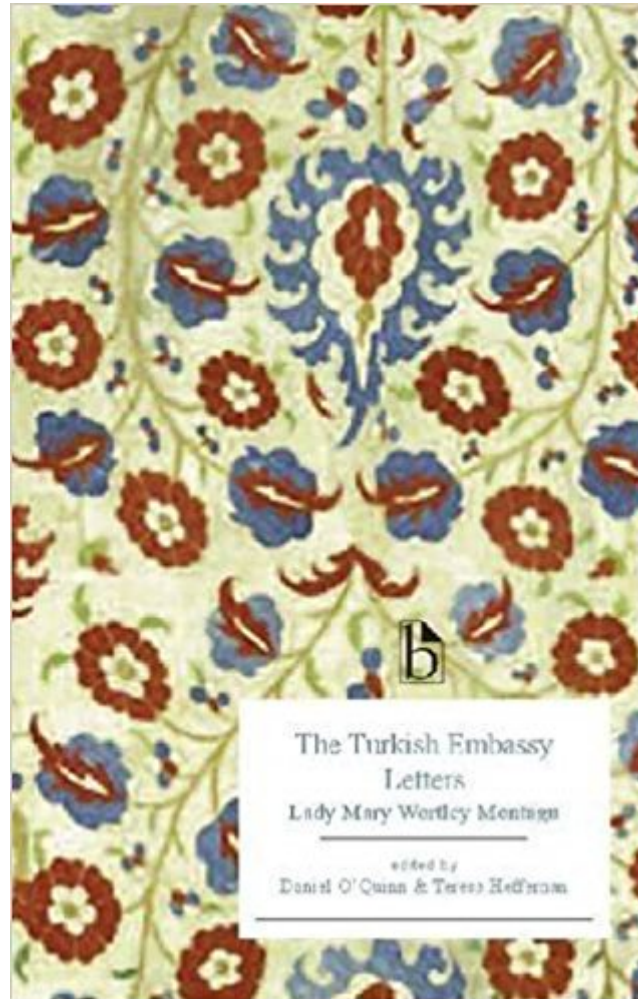




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# The Turkish Embassy Letters



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## Synopsis

In 1716, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's husband Edward Montagu was appointed British ambassador to the Sublime Porte of the Ottoman Empire. Montagu accompanied her husband to Turkey and wrote an extraordinary series of letters that recorded her experiences as a traveller and her impressions of Ottoman culture and society. This Broadview edition includes a broad selection of related historical documents on Turkey, women in the Arab world, Islam, and "Oriental" tales written in Europe.

## Book Information

Paperback: 328 pages

Publisher: Broadview Press; Broadview ed edition (September 20, 2012)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1554810426

ISBN-13: 978-1554810420

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.6 x 8.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 14.1 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.7 out of 5 stars 8 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #240,414 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #30 in Books > Travel > Asia > Turkey > General #172 in Books > Literature & Fiction > Essays & Correspondence > Letters #1425 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Travelers & Explorers

## Customer Reviews

"What a treat to see this indispensable and versatile text again available, lovingly edited by Teresa Heffernan and Daniel O'Quinn. They have followed the first edition, 1763 (illicitly published after a secret all-night copying session), while correcting their text from Montagu's own manuscript. Her idiosyncratic, open-minded, proto-feminist responses to Islamic civilization are more fascinating today than ever, and the context that the editors supply for them is simply the best yet." — Isobel Grundy, University of Alberta

"Montagu's famous Letter-book has at last received the attention it has long deserved as an important piece of eighteenth-century travel literature. The lively introduction constructs the historical and literary context of the work, while an impressive set of appendices illustrates not just her world, but also that of her interlocutors and her contemporaries." — Virginia H. Aksan, McMaster University

"In their superb Introduction to Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's The Turkish Embassy Letters, Teresa Heffernan and Daniel

O'Quinn write that "much like her letters, it is only more recently that her strategic and intelligent engagement with Ottoman culture is being mined." Their edition is a timely and compelling reminder of the reasons why we should pay attention to the writing of this remarkable woman. They have produced what will no doubt be the definitive teaching edition for years to come.

— Suvir Kaul, University of Pennsylvania

"Teresa Heffernan and Daniel O'Quinn's remarkable edition of *The Turkish Embassy Letters* illuminates the intercultural dimensions of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's account of her travels through the Ottoman Empire. Heffernan and O'Quinn's critical introduction offers a nuanced account of the text's production and circulation and of the various discourses about the East, about women, about Islam that shaped its reception. Judiciously annotated, the volume offers an impressive range of well-selected contextual materials, embracing contemporary reviews, polemics from the small-pox engrafting controversy, selections from travel writings on the Ottoman empire, British accounts of Islam, contemporary portraits of Eastern women and the harem, and Oriental tales. This is sure to become the go-to edition for scholars and teachers interested in women's writing, the history of cross-cultural contact, and the shifting thresholds dividing and conjoining Occident and Orient in the eighteenth century."

— Lynn Festa, Rutgers University

In 1716, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's husband Edward Montagu was appointed British ambassador to the Sublime Porte of the Ottoman Empire. Montagu accompanied her husband to Turkey and wrote an extraordinary series of letters that recorded her experiences as a traveller and her impressions of Ottoman culture and society. This Broadview edition includes a broad selection of related historical documents on Turkey, women in the Arab world, Islam, and "Oriental tales written in Europe."

A fantastic read. Lady Mary's letters illustrate the middle-east of the past through the lens of the west and highlights the differences between the cultures.

It's a mind blowing book. How beautiful is to get to know the life style of Ottoman Turks in Istanbul via the famous letters of an English woman...

Smooth transaction, on-time delivery, nice book. I recommend this book highly to everyone who would like to learn about Istanbul, Turks, Turkish culture and Ottoman Empire and its culture.

What a very clever and interesting book - that is, for those who are interested in early eighteenth century English customs and the Ottoman empire. Lady Mary was an English aristocrat who travelled to Constantinople in 1716 with her husband, Edward, who had been appointed Ambassador to the Turkish court in order to try to broker a peace deal between it and the Viennese court of the Habsburgs. He failed in this mission but, as a result of it, later generations of readers were treated to his wife's observations of a culture that was so foreign to her own. In her letters to her friends and family back home, she enlightened them on subjects such as the treatment of Jews in the Turkish empire (they were a very powerful element in it); the brutal attitude shown by the Turkish army to the common people, who were often left destitute after soldiers had been through their lands; the position of women in Turkish society; and the wonders of Turkish architecture, so utterly different from that in her own country. She chose her topics according to whom she was writing to. When communicating with the poet, Alexander Pope, she regaled him with lengthy quotes from Arabian poetry. When writing to a clergyman, she explained to him the religious beliefs and rituals practiced in Turkey. And, when writing to her female friends, she took great pains to describe the clothes and hair styles of the local women. In fact, one of the subjects she dwells on the most in the Letters is the women she met. She gives lengthy descriptions of the public baths that women used as meeting places, of her visits to various harems, and her attendance at an all-women pre-marriage ceremony conducted in a public bath. She describes her meetings with the wives of sultans and other great Turkish leaders, and is positively glowing with praise for their great beauty and poise. The male readers' imaginations will be set alight by her narratives! What makes the book so interesting, though, is that Lady Mary also gives her thoughtful opinions on what it is she is observing, whether it is the wearing of the veil, or her view of the practice of war, regularly indulged in by the Turks. In places, the lengthy sentences indulged in by eighteenth century writers can seem grossly overstated to our modern eye, but that is the only jarring note in what was, after all, penned three hundred years ago. It is obvious, reading the book, that Lady Mary was, at heart, an ardent romanticist. It is no wonder, then, that some years after her return to stuffy old England, she left again and spent most of the rest of her life in Italy and France. Just under two years spent under the Turkish sun had a profound effect on her. I would venture to say she was never the same woman again, and it's a great pleasure to read about the influences which shaped that process.

Wonderful insights into both Turkish and English societies, by an excellent writer. Montagu spent

two years in Turkey while her husband served as an ambassador. After returning to England, she published adaptations of works by Virgil, as well as an attack on Jonathan Swift. Her fifty-two Turkish letters were published to wide acclaim in 1763, one year after her death.<sup>1717</sup> |

Adrianople  
The Corset Stays  
I was here convinced of the truth of a reflection I had often made, that if it was the fashion to go naked, the face would be hardly observed. I perceived that the ladies with the finest skins and most delicate shapes had the greatest share of my admiration, though their faces were sometimes less beautiful than those of their companions. In short, it is the women's coffee house, where all the news of the town is told, scandal invented, etc. They generally take this diversion once a week and stay there at least four or five hours, without getting cold by immediately coming out of the hot bath into the cold room, which was very surprising to me. The lady that seemed the most considerable among them entreated me to sit by her and would fain have undressed me for the bath. I excused myself with some difficulty. They being all so earnest in persuading me, I was at last forced to open my shirt and show them my stays, which satisfied them very well, for they believed I was so locked up in that machine, that it was not in my own power to open it, which contrivance they attributed to my husband. I was charmed with their civility and beauty and should have been very glad to pass more time with them.

Robert C. Ross  
June 2015

Lady M.W.M. was a great letter writer, and though it's not fashionable to say so, I much prefer her to Mme de Sevigne, whose letters are in essence one long hysterical cry to her daughter, You never write, you never call. Per contra, Lady MWM is common-sensical, less needlessly poetic, but with the sharp, discerning eye of a spy. That is, she is a real writer. I only wish I could read her letters that were burnt, thrown away, locked up, and otherwise held away from us, because they were too much of a muchness. Were they explicit? Or were they merely telling 300 y/old secrets? No one knows, and those who do, aren't telling. But even the letters that survived are a dilly. You feel you are almost there. Good stuff, this.

I read this novel for a class in British Orientalist literature. It's a series of letters written by a woman who travels to the East. Read it in conjunction with *Arabian Nights*, *Vathek*, *Rasselas*, and some other Orientalist tales, and you can get some interesting insights in eighteenth century England and the exotic/erotic elements of the East.

Thank you for your prompt service and well represented product.

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